

HISTORIC LOG CABINS OF McLENNAN CO., TEXAS
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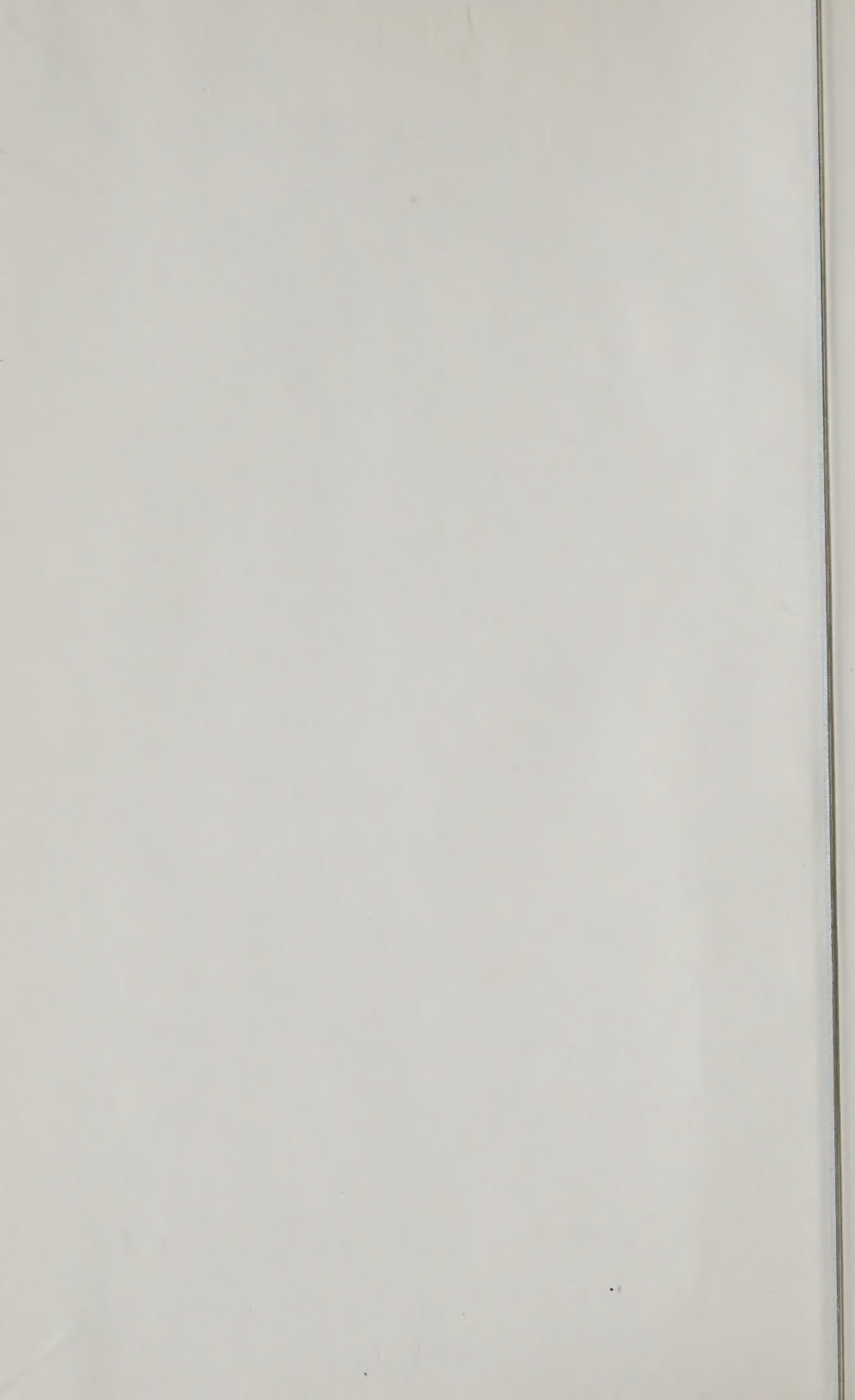
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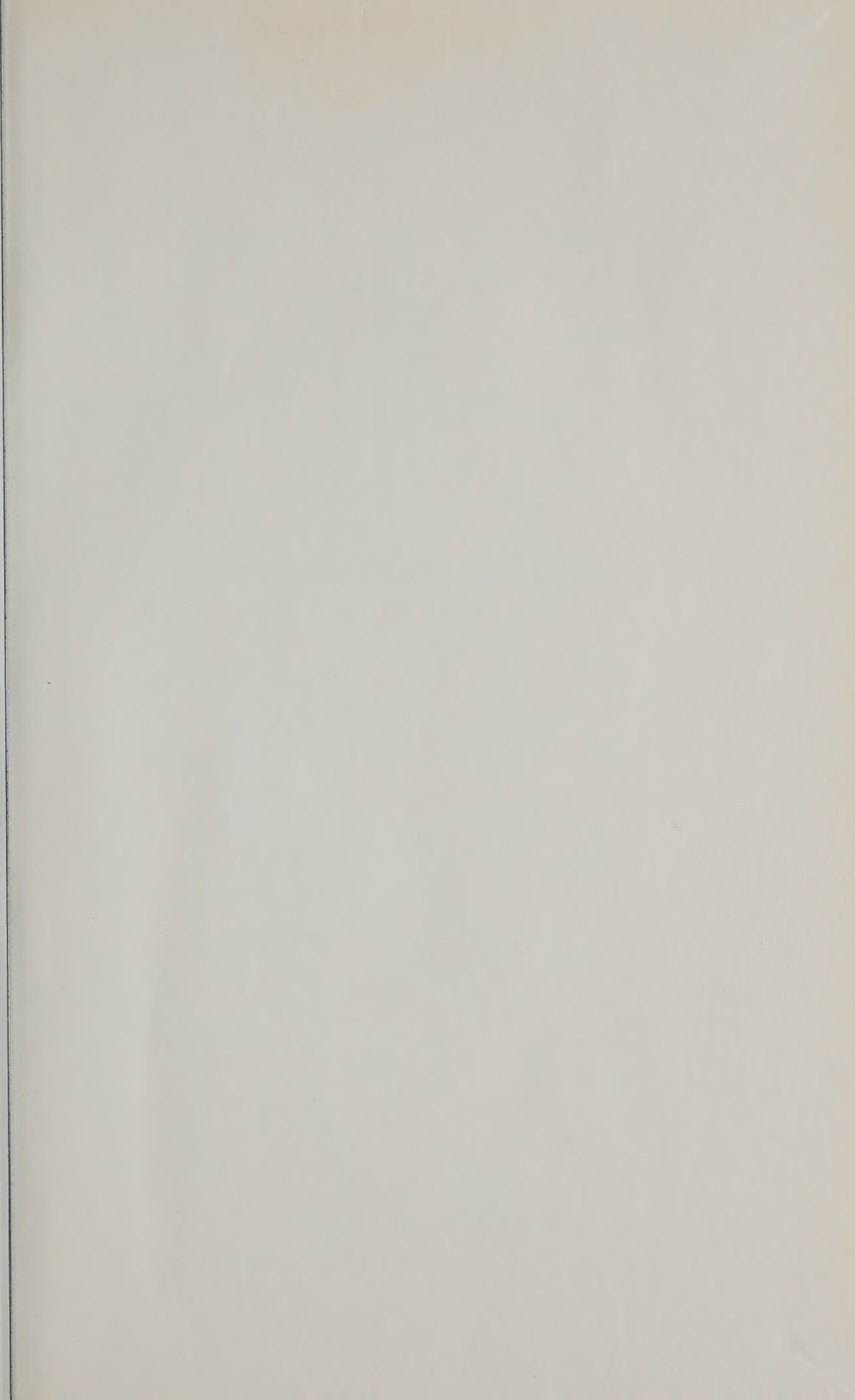
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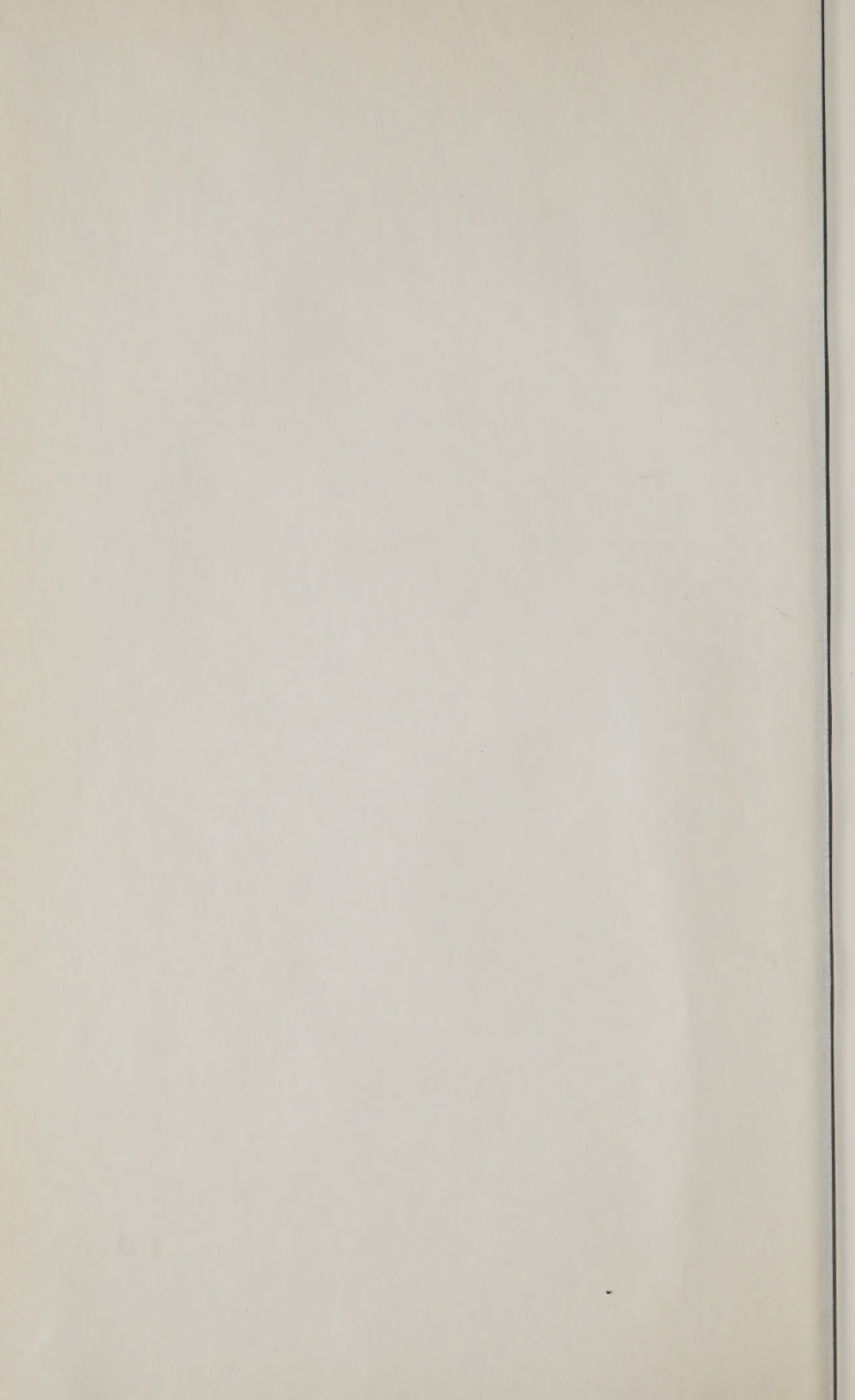
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HISTORIC LOG CABINS
OF
MCLENNAN COUNTY, TEXAS

ROGER N. CONGER

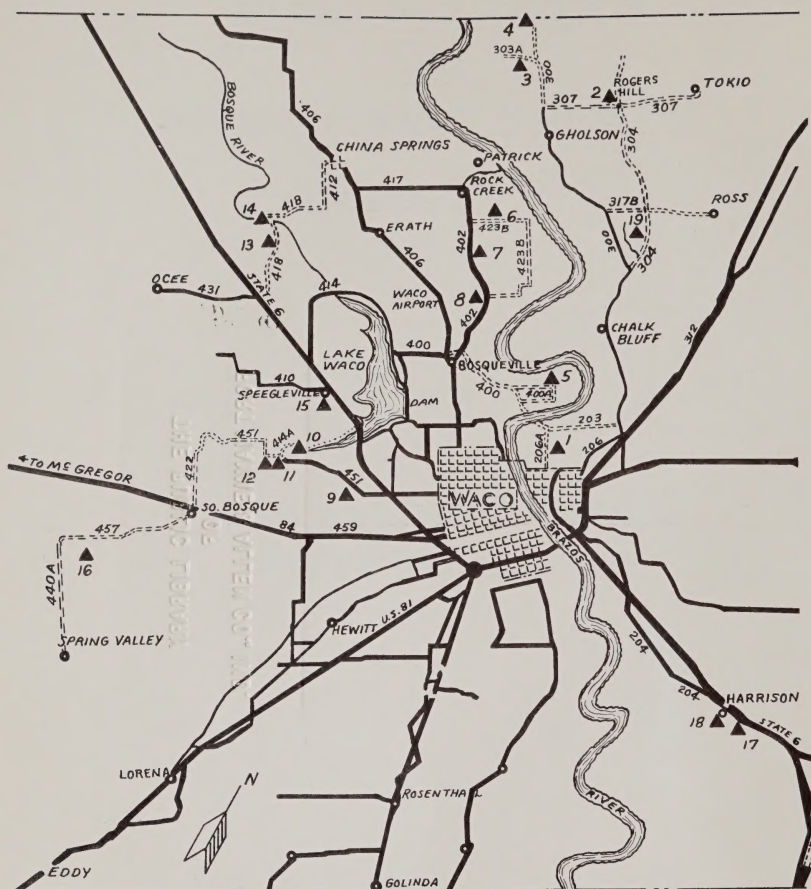
HERITAGE SOCIETY OF WACO

BULLETIN NUMBER ONE

no. 1

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HISTORIC LOG CABINS OF McLENNAN COUNTY, TEXAS

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. W.R. KELLUM | 10. DUNCAN McLENNAN |
| 2. J.T. ROGERS | 11. NEIL McLENNAN (MONUMENT) |
| 3. HACKWORTH | 12. McLENNAN |
| 4. HESSE | 13. LEE R. DAVIS |
| 5. EDDIE ROSE | 14. EICHELBERGER |
| 6. FRANK WHITE | 15. WELLS |
| 7. ROBERT WORTHAM | 16. H.J. CAUFIELD |
| 8. McNAMARA (TOLLIVER) | 17. JONES |
| 9. BRIGHT (DAVIS) | 18. SCOTT |
| 19. SAMUELS | |

FOREWORD

In October, 1953 a group of interested persons met at the Waco Public Library and organized the Heritage Society of Waco. Among the stated purposes of the Society were to be the locating and preservation of sites and landmarks of historic value, as well as documents, papers, narratives, and other objects of historical or cultural value and interest to the community and its posterity. Roger N. Conger was elected as first President.

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At the first regular meeting, in January, 1954, a number of projects were adopted and assigned. Among these were to be a study of the historic residences of Waco, with photographs; a research project on old First Street Cemetery of Waco; and a study on the still-existing historic log cabins of Waco and McLennan County.

Mr. Conger presented a paper on the latter subject at the meeting of the Society in July, 1954, and it was voted that this monograph and its accompanying photographs be published as the first Bulletin of the Society.

The assembling of the material and data on this project has been most interesting, taking the writer into remote sections of McLennan County which he had not visited for many years. The writer is most grateful to the numerous friends who have assisted in this project by furnishing leads and information. Among these are Lee Glasgow, Robert Wortham, Mrs. D. B. Tipton, Sam N. Horne, J. D. Conger, John Steinbeck, Watson Arnold, R. B. Rogers and Miss Dorothy Rogers, Mrs. Kellum George, and especially Dr. K. R. Hamorszky of Waco.

Editorial preparation for the press of manuscript and pictures, and direction of the printing and binding of the bulletin, is the contribution of Frank H. Watt, member and director of the Heritage Society.

HISTORIC LOG CABINS OF McLENNAN COUNTY, TEXAS

There are two implements we readily associate with the frontier and the building up of our early community. These are the axe and the rifle. The rifle supplied meat for the table, and protection against the wild beasts, hostile Indians, and similar dangers. The axe cleared the forests of the river valleys, providing farming land; and felled and hewed sturdy logs for cabins, barns and cribs. The writer became interested some months ago in collecting data and photographs on the still-existing log cabins in McLennan County. These picturesque landmarks are disappearing at a very rapid rate, as was learned during the progress of this interesting project.

The log cabin has been a familiar figure in American frontier history since earliest time. It was of course the most ready and available source of construction to the hardy frontiersman and his family, who pushed ahead of the march of civilization, and were too far from any saw-mill to obtain "box lumber". The preparation of the logs called for skill as well as stamina. After the trees were felled and trimmed they were generally squared from end to end, and notched at the ends for fitting together at the corners. The felling and trimming was accomplished with conventional cutting axes. The squaring of the logs was done with a so-called broad axe, which had a very wide and perfectly straight cutting edge, flat on one side and beveled on the other, for hewing. Another tool usually utilized in squaring the logs was an adze, similar in appearance to a mattock, but ground to a sharp edge like an axe. With the broad axe and adze a skilled woodsman could square an oak or cedar log almost as perfectly, from end to end, as if it had been done with saw-mill equipment. The logs, however, always bore the interesting and unmistakable marks of the tools with which they had been shaped.

Three or four different styles of notching were used by different workmen, in fitting the buildings together. The style we have found most plentiful in

this vicinity has been the "quarter notched" joint.¹ It is generally accepted that this style of notching had its origin in the deep South—Georgia, Alabama and Virginia. A somewhat more difficult joint is the "dove-tail notch"², and there are several examples of this joint in McLennan County also. This style of notching came from Pennsylvania and Ohio. A third style of joint is the "saddle notch"³, which is said to have been used generally through Missouri and Iowa.

One prime requirement for the trees to be selected was straightness. There were two types of material in this region which met that requirement, as well as being of proper diameter. One of these was the post oak, and the other was the red cedar. On the east side of the Brazos River, for example in the Gholson region, post oak was used almost exclusively. There still are many groves of excellent straight post oak trees in that vicinity, and, as a matter of fact, post oak cribs have been built in that region in the fairly recent past, say up to 25 or 30 years ago.

West of the Brazos, for example in the Bosqueville community, the red cedar was decidedly the favored material. Just beyond Bosqueville the Brazos River sweeps eastward in a vast horseshoe encircling some two thousand acres of fertile bottom land, known as Steinbeck Bend. John M. Steinbeck lives in Waco today, but he was born at the family home in the Bend in 1873. Mr. Steinbeck states that there was a broad vein of pure white sand which extended through and across this great bottom, and that it was in this belt of white sand that the red cedars grew to heroic proportions. The Steinbeck plantation embraced some 1200 acres of land, and had upon it thirteen tenant cabins, all built of red cedar logs. These great cedars also were used in the production of fence rails. John Steinbeck states that thousands of them were felled measuring thirty feet in length, almost as large in diameter at the upper end as at the bottom, and cut into three 10-foot lengths before being split for rails.

¹ See Illustration 11—Jones house.

² See Front Cover—Caufield crib.

³ See Illustration 16—Bright house.

They could generally be split as clean as a die with an ordinary cutting axe; but whenever a knot was encountered, a wedge and maul were brought into use to lay the fragrant log apart. The roofs of these tenant cabins were made of shakes (heavy shingles) rived or split from burr oak blocks thirty inches in length. They were riven off with a tool known as a froe, driven into the block with a mallet, and the shakes would split off with geometric uniformity. They were from five inches to eight inches in width, and were generally from one-fourth inch to one-half inch in thickness. No nails were used in fastening down these shakes, but instead they were weighted down by laying heavy poles across them. These shake roofs were surprisingly water tight and wind resistant.

Incidentally it was on the opposite side of the Brazos from this belt of large cedars, somewhat nearer in towards East Waco, that there grew the famous grove of "teepee pole" cedars from which the Waco Indians had for generations obtained their supplies of lodge poles. The site of this grove is on what is now the Dr. A. J. Beville farm, between Faulkner Lane and the Brazos River. In 1912 when a rather large band of the Waco Indians was brought down to the Texas Cotton Palace from their place of residence near Anadarko, Oklahoma, some of their old timers insisted upon visiting this grove of teepee pole cedars, and even persuaded the owner to allow them to cut a large number of them for shipment back to Oklahoma. They cut and prepared three railway flat cars of these poles at that time, paying the owner, one dollar for each set of eight poles.

The very first settler in the Waco region was the celebrated Indian trader George Barnard, who established his trading house on a small tributary of Tehuacana Creek some six or eight miles below Waco Village, in 1843. When the German naturalist Ferdinand Roemer visited Barnard's trading post in 1847 he recorded that the establishment consisted of seven spacious log buildings, one being used for the principal trading post operation, with the others being used for

storage of hides, furs, stocks of trade goods, and living quarters for the trading post personnel. The site of this trading post is on the well-known Tomas de la Vega Grant, and one of the log buildings actually stood until about 1929, when it was destroyed by fire. This site is near the present community of Harrison Switch, and an attractive granite monument marks the historic spot.

When the intrepid frontiersman Neil McLennan moved up here, onto the South Bosque in 1845, he erected an excellent double log cabin home. This type construction consisted of two log rooms about ten feet square, with a 10-foot hall or "dog trot" between them, and a ridge pole and roof across the entire structure. In addition a lean-to room was generally added at the back, and used as a kitchen.

When Waco Village was established in 1849 most all of the business establishments, as well as the first residences were constructed of logs. The business district was along what is now Bridge Street, and these log structures stood and were used until 1870, when that entire block was destroyed in a fire. Of course within a rather short time a crude saw-mill was set up at Second and Jackson Streets, and turned out good quality and readily saleable supplies of raw-hide lumber, from cottonwood, gum, elm and oak. Cedar was also used for making dimension lumber, and these grand old two-by-four, four-by-four, and four-by-six cedar studs and rafters are uncovered up to the present time, when old houses are being razed.

Based upon a rather close survey of the entire county, requiring some five months of research, it is believed that around fifty or sixty log cabins still exist within this county. Of course most of them that are still in use are now being utilized as cribs or barns, but many that are now being thus used were at one time residences, which saw many years of "borning and dying" and day to day living. Some six or eight of the still-existing structures are of particular interest and are due special treatment and reviewal.

To revert again to the Steinbeck Bend com-

munity, for many years a landmark in that vicinity was the Eddie Rose log cabin. It was a double structure with a lean-to at the back, and still another room adjoining from one front corner. The two main rooms and this special third room, which was the kitchen, all had fireplaces and chimneys built of bricks made from Brazos River red sand. Some fifteen years ago the Federal Government acquired the Steinbeck Bend tract of land, for a special farming development project, and broke it up into small farms. The Eddie Rose property was purchased by Albert Rentz, who used the materials in the Rose log house for making the entire framework of a large dairy barn. These splendid cedar beams can be seen in this barn today. The Rose log barn is still standing, in very poor condition. The red cedar logs in this barn measure twenty-four feet in length, and are virtually as large at one end as the other. John Steinbeck relates that the Rose family told that when the water well was dug for their home, which was erected in about 1860, a well preserved log was struck thirty feet underground, verifying that the meandering Brazos had changed its bed many years before and filled in the old channel with a deep deposit of silt and sand.

One of the most interesting log houses in the county is also near Bosqueville, this being the Frank White cabin. It was originally a double log cabin, but was boarded up many years ago. Mrs. D. B. Tipton of Waco, who was brought up in this house, has a photograph of it made in 1885. It was already standing on the property when same was purchased by her grandfather Selah White, in 1878. The tract of ground was purchased from the executors of the N. H. Conger estate. This house was probably constructed around 1860, as were many of the old places in the Bosqueville vicinity.

There is a very interesting cedar log barn on the Robert Wortham place at Bosqueville. It stands near the attractive old white two-story Wortham family home, which was built of sawed lumber in 1874. The log barn is of the double type, to enable

wagons to be driven in and unloaded into the cribs on either side. The logs in this crib are more than twenty feet long also, and according to Mr. Robert Wortham of Waco, a son of the original builder, were cut on the east side of the Brazos at Chalk Bluff, floated across, and hauled to the location.

There is an interesting log cabin of hewed oak on the John B. McNamara place at Bosqueville, same now serving as a barn, but plainly showing its original construction as a residence. For many years it was the home of an early practitioner, Dr. Tolliver.

In the China Spring area, where a number of interesting log cabins and cribs stood twenty years ago, the same have largely disappeared now. Two decidedly interesting houses do still stand however, near the celebrated Eichelberger Crossing on the Bosque River. The William Eichelberger house stands on the ancestral Eichelberger place on the north side of the stream, and about one mile south, across the river, stands the Lee R. Davis house. They are identical in construction, and virtually identical in present condition, which is not remarkable in view of the fact that they were both constructed at the same time, with work starting in 1858. All of the sills and floor joists are hewn from cedar logs, and all of the studding and rafters are sawed from massive red cedar timber. Architecture is long, narrow one-story, but with spacious attic rooms as well, with stairway leading up from the airy breezeway running through the middle of the house. The picturesque old "gallery" extends across the entire front of the house, and there is a massive chimney at either end, with fireplaces entering into each chimney on both the ground floor and attic room levels. Lee R. Davis came to McLennan County in 1847, from Burleson County, and William Eichelberger in 1852, from Milam County. It seems likely that Eichelberger was the architect for these two structures. A grandson of William Eichelberger tells that at the time the Civil War broke out there was a crew of five neighborly frontiersmen working on each of these houses, and all ten immediately left

their projects and volunteered in the Confederate Army. The houses were not completed until the soldiers returned at the war's end, and while all five of the Eichelberger workmen returned alive, all five of the Davis workmen were killed or wounded in action and never returned to their project. Near the Eichelberger house, in a shady grove near a bluff over the Bosque River, is situated the secluded Eichelberger cemetery, where the elders of this fine old family sleep in everlasting peace.

In the Speegleville vicinity there is an excellent old log crib on the Wells place, a large log barn on the Lawson place, and a very interesting barn on the Bright place. The latter was at one time a dwelling, and there are members of a Davis family living in Waco at present who were born in this excellent old cabin. An interesting feature in this Davis cabin, one which is observed in many of these log structures, is the number of large auger holes which have been bored into or through the logs. These holes measure one-and-a-quarter inches to one-and-a-half inches in diameter, and some still have oak pegs inserted in them. Their actual purpose is somewhat problematical, but some were undoubtedly used for inserting harness pegs, or pegs to support rough shelves.

On Highway 6 just north of Lake Waco is an interesting structure with hewn log sills, studding and rafters, and quite unusual rawhide lumber siding, which is the sole remaining relic of a community once known as Mount Zion. Skirting the north side of the lake beyond Highway 6 (the old South Bosque channel) about one-and-a-half miles west of the highway, we find the sagging wreckage of the once famous Duncan McLennan residence. Duncan McLennan was an elder son of Neil McLennan, Senior, and this fine old landmark was celebrated as a stopping place and social center in the early days of this county. It has two massive chimneys, one at each end of the two-story front section, with fireplaces on both levels; and another fireplace in the extreme rear of the house. All of the sills of this house are hewn from massive cedar

logs. There is only the wreckage of a spacious cedar barn at the rear of the house. The fine old bricked-in well near the house goes down a surprising distance, apparently about fifty feet.

It is on the old South Bosque Road, just beyond the famous McLennan Crossing (past the Fish Pond Club) that we come to the site of the original Neil McLennan cabin. Today this site is marked only by a rugged stone monument, with bronze plaque attached, which was dedicated to the memory of Neil McLennan in 1932 by the Waco D. A. R. Society. At that time the Neil McLennan cabin was still standing, and while it had been planked up it can still be seen rather plainly in a valuable photograph made by Gildersleeve the day the monument was dedicated. Most unfortunately this priceless heritage of our community was destroyed by fire several years ago, and no trace of it remains today. However, some one hundred yards beyond it there is still standing another McLennan cabin, nestled between two gnarled and majestic live-oak trees, where it seems to slumber like an aged patriarch. According to Monroe Walters of McGregor, a nephew of Neil McLennan, this log house was occupied by Calhoun McLennan, a relative. This property is now owned by James Warner of Waco. At the back of the pasture where this cabin stands is the ancestral McLennan cemetery—or "grave yard" as an earlier generation preferred to call it. In this hallowed plot lies the remains of the man for whom our county was named, and many of his rugged kinsmen. Neil McLennan, Senior came to the South Bosque from Pond Creek, near present Cameron. Prior to that he had lived in Florida, and earlier in North Carolina, whence he had originally emigrated from his native Scotland.

Another early settler in that community, on Harris Creek, a substantial tributary of South Bosque, was H. J. Caufield. Caufield came to McLennan County from Alabama in 1851, and was a master craftsman with pioneer tools. The double cabin of symmetrical cedar logs he built on the bank of Harris Creek has been torn down and destroyed within the past two

years, but a servant's house which stood nearby has been preserved and is still on the property. Its corners show extremely fine example of dove-tail notching. Incidentally, a colored man has been living in this structure in recent years. On another part of the old Caufield ranch a granddaughter, Mrs. Betty Caufield Arnold, is living today, in the fine old two-story frame house built in later years by the Caufield family. Watson Arnold of Waco, a great-grandson of H. J. Caufield, recently acquired an interesting log cabin which had been torn down on the Gay farm on the old McGregor road west of Waco. Sam N. Horne, now of Waco, lived in this house as a child, around 1900, after it had been boarded over and added onto. Mr. Horne states that it was originally erected as a school house by J. B. Crain, about 1860. Arnold has removed the logs to his camp ground near McLennan Crossing where he plans to reconstruct it as nearly as possible to its original appearance.

There are a few log cribs west of the Brazos in the southern section of the county, and a few on the opposite side of the stream, but none of particular antiquity or interest. At Harrison Switch there is a picturesque one-room residence on the Monroe Jones place, and a double structure on the Scott place. The Scott structure has the decided appearance of having always been a crib or barn, but Scott states emphatically that it was for years the comfortable and respected residence of the Donahue family.

Heading finally now toward the Northeastern section of the county, we come to one of the best sections of all. In the main this was a section of heavy growth of straight post oak timber, and there are several really outstanding log structures still remaining.

However, before getting to Gholson community, one may skirt out through East Waco to the Dripping Springs Road, turning off Faulkner Lane at the large frame residence of the Reverend Iglehart. Just about two miles north on the Dripping Springs Road stands the remains of one of our most historic log cabins. It

was erected in about 1852 by W. R. Kellum, a real pioneer agriculturist, merchant and financier. Nearby is the old Kellum cemetery, circled with an attractive wrought iron fence. The Kellum house was of the double cabin type, with saddle notch corners. One cabin has completely fallen, but the other is still standing, and this fine old landmark is near the main road, in open pasture, and can readily be visited and studied. A granddaughter, Mrs. W. K. George, still lives on the ancestral property, as does her son Kellum George.

In the Gholson community there are several very picturesque log cribs and the one-room Hesse residence. While the chimney of the Hesse house has long since fallen, the chinking between the post oak logs is still visible.

Beyond Gholson on a sandy hill above Aquilla Creek stands the historic J. T. Rogers house. It is the center of the community known as Rogers Hill, and members of this family still live in this community, and others in Waco. The J. T. Rogers cabin is the only two-story log residence in the county, to the writer's knowledge. Its massive stone chimney furnishes a large fireplace to the ground floor, and a smaller one to the upstairs. J. T. Rogers came to McLennan County in the late 1860's, acquired a 1200-acre tract, cleared this hill-top site and erected his cabin. The original roof was of course of oak shakes. There is a deep cistern on the side gallery, from which splendid drinking water was always available to the traveler. In this connection, however, it is legendary that in early days there were quite a few renegades and outlaws hanging out in the remote Aquilla bottoms, and the Rogers family was decidedly cautious at the approach of a stranger. If Mr. Rogers was suspicious of the appearance of the approaching rider he would ascend to the upper room and "cover" the road with his rifle or pistol, from the chink which may be observed in the photograph, just to the left of the upstairs window. If the stranger was able to give satisfactory introduction and identification to Mrs. Rogers, he was promptly invited in for rest and refreshment. But, if he was not able

to give a satisfactory introduction it was brought to his attention that he was duly "covered", and that it would be well for him to move on up the road.

Some ten years ago a group of Waco hunters leased this old house and some acreage adjoining, for a hunting club, and the writer had the decided pleasure of sleeping a couple of nights in this historic upstairs room, and of drying himself and his soaked garments before the ancient fireplace after a thorough wetting in the sloughs of the Aquilla bottom.

An interesting specimen of the double log cabin may be seen on the Baylor campus. It is located on South 7th Street just north of the Waco Creek bridge. It is not a native McLennan County cabin, however, having been transported from East Texas and reconstructed at its present location.

This cabin is constructed of neatly hewn oak logs, with saddle-notched joints. It was erected at its present site in 1933 by the Mary West Chapter of The United Daughters of the Confederacy, as a museum. A rather extensive collection of historical material, furniture, pictures and photographs, etc., were duly collected and placed in this cabin, and the doors provided with padlocks. A permanent attendant was not provided. Most unfortunately the contents of the museum were raided and severely damaged by rats within a comparatively short time. Even more unfortunately, the padlocks yielded also to human vandals, who stole much of the valuable material therein and left the remainder a sad shambles.

The cabin stands open today, and while it is not native to this county as previously stated, still it does offer an excellent and interesting example of its type and age, for study by the hobbyist and historian.

As was mentioned earlier, many of these old houses have been torn down or otherwise destroyed within the last very few years. It is a source of genuine regret that this project was not undertaken at least ten years ago.

Roger N. Conger
May, 1954



1. DEDICATION OF THE NEIL McLENNAN MONUMENT. In 1932 the Daughters of The American Revolution erected a stone monument at the site of the old log home of pioneer settler Neil McLennan. The cabin can be seen, boarded up, in this photograph, but it was lost by fire a few years later.



2. J. T. ROGERS HOUSE, ROGERS HILL, AQUILLA CREEK. This interesting old residence is the only two-story log cabin remaining in McLennan County. This photograph shows the west side. There is a cistern on the east gallery.



3. McLENNAN HOUSE, SOUTH BOSQUE. This house was occupied by some of the McLennan family, and is located near the historic McLennan grave-yard. The land is now owned by Mr. James Warner.



4. LEE R. DAVIS HOUSE, NEAR EICHELBERGER ISLAND. Lee R. Davis came to McLennan County in 1847, and married Katherine McLennan, a daughter of Neil McLennan, Sr. This house was started in 1858.



5. EICHELBERGER HOUSE, BOSQUE RIVER, NEAR CHINA SPRING. Built by William Eichelberger of Pennsylvania. Identical in form and foundation to the Lee Davis house. They were erected at same time, starting in 1858.



6. HACKWORTH HOUSE, NEAR GHOLSON. This well-built oak cabin was originally double, with an equivalent room to the right, with "dog trot" hallway between. The old grind stone had served as a step.



7. DR. TOLLIVER HOUSE, BOSQUEVILLE. This comfortable old residence has had the sheds added. This was the front door, and the fireplace was on the opposite end of the room. Location is on the John McNamara place at Bosqueville.



8. KELLUM HOUSE, DRIPPING SPRINGS ROAD, EAST WACO. Members of the family still own the property where stands this historic double log home built in 1852 or earlier.



9. KELLUM HOUSE, EARLIER VIEW. A family scene taken at the W. R. Kellum house many years ago. The old Dripping Springs Road is shown.



10. HESSE HOUSE, NEAR GHOLSON. The fireplace opening is shown, although the stone chimney has fallen or been removed.



11. JONES HOUSE, HARRISON SWITCH. The brick chimney has fallen. Undoubtedly there are other undiscovered log cabins concealed under boarding such as this.



12. FRANK WHITE HOUSE, BOSQUEVILLE. This interesting log home was boarded up and added to many years ago. This photograph shows east side, was taken in 1954.



13. FRANK WHITE HOUSE, EARLIER VIEW. This Fanning family scene was taken at the Frank White house west side, in 1885.



14. WORTHAM LOG BARN, BOSQUEVILLE. This is a well preserved double log barn, of red cedar, with logs twenty-two feet in length running the long way. The Wortham residence built in 1874 stands nearby.



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15. EDDIE ROSE BARN, STEINBECK BEND, BOSQUEVILLE. The red cedar logs in the sides of this barn measure twenty-four feet in length. The hewed beams and wall logs of the Rose residence are now to be seen in a nearby dairy barn, otherwise quite modern.



16. BRIGHT HOUSE, WEST OF HIGHWAY 6, WACO. This was a comfortable, well constructed house, with excellent "saddle notching". Several persons living in Waco today were born in this house.



17. WELLS CRIB, SPEEGLEVILLE



18. SAMUELS CRIB, GHOLSON

